

12 OCT 1971

ORG 1

OAS (Organization of American States)

Approved For Release 2005/01/12 : CIA-RDP88-01315R000400130003-4

# For Cuba, the O.A.S. Is Almost Beside The Point

By DAVID BINDER

WASHINGTON—Fidel Castro once called the Organization of American States "the whorehouse of imperialism." But the handsome vaulted O.A.S. building with its palm-studded courtyard on the corner of 17th and Constitution in Washington looks much more like a retirement home for the 23 ambassadors who meet there occasionally.

With few exceptions it has always been like this in the O.A.S. and its predecessor groupings back to 1899 when the first conference of American states was held in Washington. Power was exercised by those who had power, principally the United States, regardless of what high-minded officials of the Hemisphere organization said or did.

The outstanding exception often cited by O.A.S. defenders occurred in July, 1969, when El Salvador and its neighbor, Honduras, clashed over a series of soccer matches, severed relations and then actually went to war so bloodily that more than 1,000 troops were killed. The O.A.S. stepped in firmly as a mediator and eventually persuaded both sides to quit fighting.

Although inactive, Cuba still rates as one of 24 members of the organization, despite political and economic sanctions voted against Havana in 1964. Now, a majority of the other members plan to vote to lift the sanctions in a meeting of foreign ministers in Quito, Ecuador, beginning Nov. 8. The United States will probably go along with the majority if it is left free to determine its own policy toward Cuba.

Mr. Castro's disillusionment with the organization began with the abortive Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba sponsored by the United States Central Intelligence Agency in 1961. It was a clear violation of the 1946 Treaty of Rio de Janeiro, on which the O.A.S. is based. That treaty's declared purpose was "to provide for effective reciprocal assistance to meet armed attacks against any American state." The loudest voices raised at that time in the organization's headquarters belonged to the three big macaws who perch in the courtyard palms.

Mr. Castro became more bitter in 1964 when the O.A.S. Permanent Council voted the sanctions against Cuba on the ground that the revolutionary government of Havana had promoted "terrorism, sabotage, guerrilla actions and assault" against Venezuela.

A lot has changed in the decade since. Mr. Castro has retreated almost entirely from a policy of "export of revolution" that caused the death in 1967 of his comrade, Ernesto Che Guevara, at the head of a guerrilla column in Bolivia.

In recognition of a more tractable Cuba, seven South American and Caribbean states have taken up diplomatic relations with the Castro Government and more plan to do so in the next months.

Acceptance and recognition of a Communist Cuba in the Hemisphere setting gradually emerged as a means by which other Latin-American states could gain the attention of the United States, which was otherwise preoccupied. More than that, the policy of isolating Cuba pursued so relentlessly in the Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon Administrations has revealed itself as a policy that was gradually isolating

the United States from some of its major Latin-American, and O.A.S., partners: Peru, Argentina, Panama, Mexico. All cultivated relations with Cuba.

## The Kissinger 'Dialogue'

Mindful of this, Secretary of State Kissinger proposed one year ago a "new Hemisphere dialogue" starting with a convention of the organization's foreign ministers in Mexico City last February. The group met again in Atlanta in April and scheduled a further meeting for Buenos Aires in March, 1975.

The knottiest issue on the agenda from the beginning was that of Cuba. Ranged against the 13 or 14 Latin-American states that comprise the pro-Cuba faction in the O.A.S. are the conservative military-dominated governments of Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Bolivia and Uruguay.

The very fact that all of the organization members have deferred since last year to consultations of the Hemisphere foreign ministers would seem to imply that the organization itself was already a diplomatic fiction.

"Would Canada consider joining the O.A.S.?" a diplomatic representative from the Ottawa Government, which attends organization sessions only to "observe" and which has never broken off relations with Cuba, was asked in Atlanta last April. "Not bloody likely," was the reply. Judging from the polemics of Mr. Castro and his aides, Cuba's attitude would seem to be the same.

Yet the O.A.S. remains as the only legitimate forum of the Latin-American and other Hemisphere states. Were the O.A.S. to lift its sanctions in November and invite Cuba to become an active member in March, some knowledgeable observers believe Mr. Castro would do so.

After all, Mr. Castro has been presenting himself simultaneously as a friend of the Soviet Union, a representative of the so-called Third World, a member of the nonaligned grouping and a Latin-American patriot. Why not renew membership in the O.A.S. club as well? these observers ask.

But the truth is that the Cuban question and some other major issues are beyond the capacity of the organization. Some examples: The future of the Panama Canal, Venezuela's oil riches on a continent of want, and the seeming shift of Latin-American societies from left-wing diversity to right-wing conformity.

It is in this context that the end-of-September visit of Senators Jacob K. Javits and Claiborne Pell to Cuba ought to be seen. They were warmly received by Mr. Castro as harbingers of a better relationship with Washington. He released four of 33 American citizens held prisoner on his island as a further "gesture of goodwill." Secretary Kissinger called the Pell-Javits visit "very useful."

This would appear to mean that current Hemisphere problems, when they are really difficult, will be handled directly, instead of through the O.A.S. That is the way it always was.

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